

ENG 469/569
THINKING ABOUT ANIMALS
Professor LeMenager PLC 457
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Course Description: This course intends to provoke questions about the meaning of animals in human life and culture, the philosophical status of “the animal” versus the human, the cultures of animals, and the possibilities of interspecies companionship and communication. We take the arts of literature and film as our primary archive in the investigation of how it feels to be human, to be companioned by animals, to be animal, and to consider alternatives to this strong binary.

Texts:

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999)
Claire Preston, *Bee* (2006)
Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely, *WE3* (2011)
Blackfish (Dir. Gabriela Cowperthwaite, 2013).
Project Nim (Dir. James Marsh, 2011)
The Planet of the Apes (Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968)

All other readings to be posted on Blackboard

Assignments:

Participation (10%): Participation includes regular attendance and being intellectually “present” in the class to discuss course readings and films. You are allowed one unexplained absence. Every other absence must be documented.

Student-Led Discussion (10%): Student teams lead discussion about three class films. Each team must create a carefully considered, guided conversation for the class as a whole about the film in question. This will require watching the film ahead of time and meeting at least once to divide tasks and formalize speaking roles.

Midterm Exam (25%): An in-class midterm exam tests students’ knowledge of course readings and films. You will be asked to identify and explain course concepts (40% of grade) and choose three quotations and/or scenes that have challenged your way of thinking, explaining in detail why they have had this effect (60% of grade). **April 23rd.**

Student Fieldwork/Portfolio Presentation (40%): Students will enter “the field” of our local environment to record observations of animals, plants, and other life encountered in the everyday. Each student should choose a place to conduct her/his field study that is accessible from the student’s residence by bike or foot. Allow yourself to be alert and attentive to this place for at least an hour, taking down notes, taking pictures with your phone, and/or recording observations. From your field study, choose one form of life (animal, plant, etcetera) for which you will create a portfolio to upload to our class website and to present to the class. One goal of the portfolio is to make a form of life perhaps overlooked in your everyday routines into a virtual “star,” as charismatic as a grizzly or panda bear. The portfolio will include: 1) a description of your chosen life form, in your own words, derived from biological science; 2) your personal reflections on it, which may feature sketches, writing, or photos/video; 3) notation of literature, art, or films in which this life form has appeared (you can begin to find such traces with a simple Internet search). **You will upload your portfolio on or before Week 9 and present it to the class during Week 9.**

Final Gloss (Exam) (15%): A short take-home final exam requires you to identify and comment upon ten quotations from course readings after the midterm exam. **Due June 14th.**

Schedule

3/31 Course Introduction: *Microcosmos* (dirs. Claude Nurdsany, Marie Pérennou, 1196)

QUESTIONS OF ETHICS

WEEK 1

3/31 J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999)

4/2 *The Lives of Animals* (1999), René Descartes and Jeremy Bentham, Excerpts

WEEK 2

4/7 *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Jeremy Bentham, Excerpt

4/9 LAB: Choose Your Species/Field Day

UNEQUAL PERSONHOOD

WEEK 3

4/14 Martha Nussbaum, "The Moral Status of Animals"; Tom Regan, "The Rights of Humans and Other Animals"

4/16 *Blackfish* (Dir. Gabriela Cowperthwaite, 2013). STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION

WEEK 4

4/21 John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" (1977); Joy Williams, "Animal People" (1999)

4/23 In Class Midterm

OBSERVATION AND EXPERIMENT

WEEK 5

4/28 E. O. Wilson, "Bernhardsdorp" (1984), Henry David Thoreau, "Brute Neighbors" (1854)

4/30 Vicki Hearne, "A Walk with Washoe: How Far Can We Go?" from *Adam's Task* (1982); Barbara Smuts, "Encounters with Animal Minds," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (2001)

WEEK 6

5/5 *Project Nim* (Dir. James Marsh, 2011) STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION

CULTURES OF ANIMALS/CULTURES OF EXTINCTION

5/7 Claire Preston, *Bee* (2006)

WEEK 7

5/12 *Bee* (cont'd), Thomas Seeley

5/14 Elizabeth Kolbert, "Silent Hives" (2012), Nathaniel Rich, "The Mammoth Cometh" (2014)

WEEK 8

5/19 Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely, *WE3* (2011)

5/21 *WE3*, Donna J. Haraway, "Taking Care of Unexpected Country" (2011)

WEEK 9

5/26 LIFE OVERLOOKED STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

5/28 LIFE OVERLOOKED STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

HUMAN NATURES

WEEK 10

6/2 *The Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968) STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION

6/4 Tim Ingold, "Humanity and Animality" (1994), Charles C. Mann, "The State of the Species" (2013)

APPENDIX

Notes on Your "Life Overlooked" Portfolio Assignment

Identification Aids: If you're having trouble identifying a life form and don't know a friendly local biologist—or plant and animal lover—there are websites that can help you zero in on an identification. Alternately, you can choose a species local to our area and see if you can find and observe an individual. Here are some good sites.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Species Index: (<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/species/>)

The Oregon Flora Project

(<http://www.oregonflora.org/>)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

(<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/citsci/>)

Washington State University's Northwest Plants Database: (<http://pnwplants.wsu.edu/>)

The University of Washington's WTU Image Collection or Wildflowers App:

(<http://biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection.php>)

Oregon State University's woody plant identification system:

(http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/plant_ident/)

Form of Portfolio: Once you've located your species, then you need to decide what form you'd like the Portfolio to take. It can exist as either a website or a printed "book" that you create. You can make a Facebook page for your species, a Weebly site, or a Tumblr blog. If you choose to make the Portfolio into a print book, you can use a text-based model, in other words creating a collection of short "papers" to hand in, housed in a folder. Or you can add visual material and even samples of, say, a plant's leaves or seed, into your DIY species book. Look at Claire Preston's *Bee* for an example of a contemporary natural history and the kinds of information it conveys.